

EX-PRESIDENT ELIOT'S "NEW RELIGION."

It is almost a waste of time and space to discuss the "new religion" which Ex-president Eliot has lately prophesied and which many who are ignorant of the true situation and of the history of religion are so vigorously exploiting. The distinguished ex-president probably got his ideas out of his "five-foot shelf of books," as the Bible is not included in that five-foot shelf. But a word or two may be added.

And first of all, the "new religion" of Dr. Eliot is far from new. Men have been trying for nearly two thousand years to propagate exactly what he outlines, and they have failed in all the ages as ignominiously as this new effort on the same old line will fail. One denomination in particular, noted for its culture, possessed of every facility for internal growth and external aggression, for inward strengthening and outward propagandism, except the one element of a sound system, with Boston and Harvard for its heart and center, has been trying for seventy-five years to induce men to accept the fundamental points of the distinguished ex-president, who is but revamping the old doctrines of his cult. But that denomination is no further along today than it was seven decades ago, while those whose doctrines it has historically and energetically opposed have multiplied right alongside of it over and over again.

And next, the so-called "new religion" will have no creed or dogma! And then the distinguished scholar and thinker goes on to define what it will believe and what principles will guide it! He gives a creed, somewhat extended, and lays down the principles, that is, the dogmas, of the "new religion" which will have no creed! Chief among the articles of the creed which this creedless religion will have will be one denying all "supernatural" elements. Another will be no ritual. Another will be no priests. Another will be no authority. Another will be the development of co-operative good-will as its discipline. So here we have some five or six articles in this creedless creed! Dr. Eliot ought to know enough of the laws of the human mind to know that it can not exist and perform its functions without belief, that rationality and a creed are inseparable. The very agnostic who says he believes nothing because he knows nothing expresses that one belief and it is his creed. The universal skeptic, who doubts everything, believes that he doubts, and thus declares the fundamental nature to him of at least that one belief. Men will not cease to have a creed until they cease to have minds.

Dr. Eliot's substitution of "culture" for conviction is folly when the light of experience or history is thrown upon it. Culture and intellectuality, apart from some inward convictions, only tend to superciliousness. Paul made few converts in Athens. The people were too content with their learning. And the city was wholly given to idolatry! And a real religion without supernaturalism means a religion which eliminates faith, which makes of soul, spirit, life, love, consecration, zeal, and of every grace of the new life, a mere development, an evolution. The principle of regeneration, which is the most profoundly philosophical in all the realm of truth, is to be rejected, because it calls for the intervention of the supernatural!

The long and short of it is that Dr. Eliot is simply a propagandist and prophet of his own Unitarian belief and according to the tenets and logical conclusion of that faith is simply at best but a preacher of humanitarianism which he would substitute for religion. His principles, in their last analysis, hardly rise higher than those of Ingersoll, only that the latter's ridicule and blasphemy did more to shock the mind than the specious but not less dangerous notions of the Harvard ex-president.

ADVANCED VIEWS.

From published accounts of the proceedings of the Pan-Presbyterian Council recently held in New York, we learn that "Probably the most outspoken expression of 'advanced views' was that of President Jas. D. Moffatt, of Washington and Jefferson College." In his sermon before the Council he is quoted as saying, "If the Church should go back to Apostolic times for its theology, as some have suggested, it would be better fitted for the needs of the first than the twentieth century."

If this statement has a definite meaning, it is that the teachings of the apostles and of the Scriptures which they believed to be true and accepted as authoritative, are not a sufficient, if indeed a reliable rule of faith and life, for the age in which we live; and that truth which has been discovered or evolved since the days of the apostles, is essential to an adequate system of sound doctrine and consequently to right living. The speaker continued:

"Let our scholars seek to determine the authorship of the books of the Bible and the circumstances of their composition, even if their conclusions be such as to reverse all our traditional beliefs; meanwhile we may continue to use their contents for religious or ethical purposes as before. Systematic theology may be revolutionized, if some of these critical contentions prevail, for the Bible can then be employed by theologians only as other literature is appealed to. But the Scriptures can still be used effectively for the doctrine that bears on life."

Here we are assured that critical contentions may so prevail and so revolutionize theology that the Bible can be employed by theologians only as other literature is appealed to. As we understand this college president, the teachings of the Bible are to be regarded only as an imperfect working hypothesis, which is liable to be seriously impaired by the advance of modern scholarship, even to the extent of the Bible's being abandoned as a sufficient and authoritative rule of faith and practice. The miner may prudently continue working his mine while the assayer is making an analysis of samples of the mineral deposit, in order to determine whether ore exists in paying quantities, or whether indeed the desired mineral exists at all, or only what was supposed at first to be a by-product.

It may be remembered that at the Liverpool Council Dr. Moffett read an interesting paper that was regarded as both able and conservative. Subsequently he was a member of the joint committee which adopted the Articles of Agreement for the Council of Reformed Churches, and later was prominent in the proceedings of the Des Moines Assembly which consummated the absorption of a portion of the Cumberland Church.